
Legislative Initiative**CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH/EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENTS
CONFERENCE PLANNING**

Study Author

Virginia Commission on Youth

Enabling Authority

§ 30-174 and § 30-175

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the Commission on Youth meeting on May 17, 2006, Commission staff, in conjunction with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS), was directed to commence planning for a statewide conference on children's mental health/evidence-based practices. The conference would educate behavioral health professionals on evidence-based practices for children and adolescents with mental health disorders. There is an identified need for training for local, state, and private providers, as well as consumers, on evidence-based treatments for children with mental health disorders. Training would address utilization and implementation of evidence-based treatments in diverse and numerous settings, with homes, schools, communities, and both public and private sector providers being targeted audiences.

To plan for this conference, the Commission, with assistance from the DMHMRSAS, has organized a Conference Planning Committee comprised of representatives from state and local child-serving agencies, private providers, organizations and other child-serving agencies. The Planning Committee met August 21, 2006 and recommended that the Commission investigate utilization of a University Conference Planner. The Planning Committee also recommended that the Commission formally collaborate with Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services on Systems of Care Training. A smaller planning subcommittee was established to offer suggestions about the details of the planning. This subcommittee met January 3, 2007. The subcommittee is assisting with the following tasks:

- Determining scope of conference
- Determining target audience
- Determining conference dates/timeline
- Developing conference project plan
- Forming core planning group/subcommittees

Four subcommittees have been established to accomplish the above tasks:
Agenda/Speakers; Marketing/Target Audience; Sponsors/Exhibits; and Family Participation.

During the 2007 study year, Commission on Youth staff will update the Commission on the status of conference planning activities, in lieu of a formal report. It is anticipated that the conference will take place in Fall 2007.

Legislative Initiative
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION OPTIONS

Study Author

Virginia Commission on Youth

Enabling Authority

§ 30-174 and § 30-175

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At its May 17, 2006 meeting, the Commission on Youth approved the study of Alternative Education Options and directed staff to study this issue and to present findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2007 General Assembly Session.

At the Commission on Youth meeting on May 17, 2006, Commission staff was directed to conduct a review of alternative education programs for suspended and expelled youth. Additionally, the Commission was to explore data available at the Department of Education to determine whether a problem exists regarding the number of school suspensions and expulsions within Virginia public schools. Recommendations would be offered to address any study findings.

During the 2006 study year, the Virginia Commission on Youth researched the availability of alternative education programs for expelled and suspended students who could not be served in traditional public school settings. This investigation also addressed the various challenges facing school divisions in serving these students. The Commission established an Alternative Education Advisory Group consisting of representatives from the School Board Association, the Education Association, and local school divisions. The Advisory Group met three times through the course of the study (July 12, August 9 and September 19). The Commission also conducted a survey of all 132 school divisions to gather information on Virginia's alternative education options.

Following presentations by Commission on Youth staff at the October 3 and November 28, 2006 meetings, the Commission on Youth adopted the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1 (No Commission Approval Required)

The Commission on Youth will survey school divisions to receive a complete picture of locally created alternative education programs and ascertain whether there are unmet service needs. The results of the survey shall be communicated to the Virginia Commission on Youth.

Recommendation 2

The Commission on Youth will compile a best practices guide for alternative education programs/practices. The guide will include a listing of all existing alternative education programs across the Commonwealth, including local programs. This compilation will commence once survey data is analyzed and shall be conducted. The Commission shall complete the guide prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.

Recommendation 3

The Commission on Youth, in conjunction with other child-serving agencies, shall investigate ways to increase funding for a second tier of regional alternative education

programs. Such an investigation will be based on an analysis of survey results. Any proposal for a second tier of funding shall not dilute the funding already distributed to existing regional programs. The findings from this investigation shall be reported to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.

Recommendation 4

The Commission on Youth, in conjunction with various child-serving agencies, including the Department of Education, Department of Criminal Justice Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Health, and Department of Social Services, will investigate ways to fund prevention programs to supplant funding lost in recent years from the decreases in the federal Safe and Drug-Free School grants. The findings from this investigation will be reported to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly.

Recommendation 5

The Commission on Youth will continue to study alternative education program options and report findings to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.

An Interim Report on Alternative Education Options will be submitted in Spring 2007, with a Final Report published in 2008.

Legislative Initiative

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

Study Author

Virginia Commission on Youth

Enabling Authority

§ 30-174 and § 30-175

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At its May 17, 2006 meeting, the Virginia Commission on Youth approved the study of the Establishment of an Office of Children's Services Ombudsman.

The study related directly to a 2006 General Assembly legislative proposal, Senate Bill 208. Senate Bill 208, introduced by Senator John Edwards, proposed to create an Office of Children's Services Ombudsman within the legislative branch of state government. On January 10, 2006, SB 208 was referred to the Senate Committee on General Laws and Technology. This Committee reviewed the bill on January 25, 2006 and heard testimonies. Committee members expressed concerns about the bill, particularly with the administration of child protection and child welfare laws. Committee members unanimously agreed that it would be appropriate to have the impact of the bill carefully studied by the Virginia Commission on Youth. Consequently, the Committee sent a letter requesting the Commission on Youth to further study the impact of SB 208.

The Commission on Youth directed staff to study the impact of SB 208 in three areas:

- Determine the need for the establishment of an Office of Children's Services Ombudsman;
- Determine the appropriate administrative structure of an Office of Children's Services Ombudsman; and
- Determine the cost to establish an Office of Children's Services Ombudsman.

The Commission on Youth directed staff to present findings and recommendations to the Commission prior to the 2007 General Assembly Session.

As the bill proposed, the mission of the Office of Children's Services Ombudsman in Virginia would be to: (1) protect children and parents from harmful agency action or inaction; (2) investigate the acts of state and local administrative agencies adversely affecting children; (3) recommend appropriate changes toward the goals of safeguarding the rights of children and parents; and (4) promote higher standards of competency, efficiency and justice in the administration of the child protection and child welfare laws, juvenile justice services and education of children. SB 208 also set forth requirements for receiving complaints.

During the 2006 study year, Commission staff was guided by the following working definition of an ombudsman:

An ombudsman is an official who receives and investigates complaints on behalf of private citizens. These complaints are usually against a particular act of government or government delivery service. Such services could include education, child welfare system, criminal justice and services to the elderly. An ombudsman serves as a neutral party with the goal of obtaining an impartial solution. Ombudsman services can differ depending on (1) the specialty of the service delivery system, (2) governing authority and (3) jurisdiction. Although services vary, most ombudsman services typically share four main principles: independence, impartiality, confidentiality and credible review process.

Commission staff researched numerous legislative and executive studies related to children's services, child-serving agencies in Virginia and ombudsman services in other states. In addition, the Commission established an Office of Children's Services Advisory Group consisting of representatives from executive government agencies, judicial system, advocacy organizations, private citizens and legislative members. The Advisory Group met three times through the course of the 2006 study year (July 13, August 9 and September 25). The Commission held two statewide public hearings (July 27 in Norfolk and August 24 in Roanoke).

Following a presentation by Commission on Youth staff at its November 28, 2006 meeting, the Commission on Youth adopted the following recommendation:

Continue to study the establishment of an Office of Children's Services Ombudsman. Findings and recommendations from this study shall be made to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.

An Interim Report on the Study of the Establishment of an Office of Children's Services Ombudsman will be available in early 2007, with a Final Report published in 2008.